

## Editorial | Surveillance and Religion

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To introduce this special issue on surveillance and religion, we begin by inviting you to observe an imaginary group discussion. The session begins with a Ghanaian Jehovah's Witness talking, following the government-enforced closure of their places of worship in 1989, of clandestine meetings in homes, reached by walking in work clothes to give the impression to suspicious neighbours that she is only heading for farm labour. Coming from early seventeenth century Japan, another participant tells of his acquiring a temple registration certificate during a period of persecution to prove to the Shōgun authorities that his prior loyalty to the Christian community has ended. Next, a Muslim participant from twenty-first century India relates her fear at the intrusion into her religious freedom by politicised Hindu fundamentalist vigilantes. Describing his protest at Israeli state surveillance, a Palestinian activist talks of his difficulties of gaining access to the sites of worship at Haram-al-Sharif in Jerusalem. A New Yorker next discusses the dilemma facing members of his mosque who fear breaching their religious principles by suspecting an innocent Muslim of being a police informant in a context where the whole community is perceived by the state as a threat to national security. From a Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints attempting to insulate itself from government scrutiny in an isolated area of Canada, a contemporary story is then told of maintaining secrecy through non-technical forms of intra-community surveillance. Turning the conversation towards smartphone apps, a Dutch Christian describes her use of *Dagelijks Woord* to self-surveil her daily Bible-reading discipline. A British Christian picks up the theme in her account of how faith shapes her behaviour in the surveilled space of Twitter. Drawing from his Christian tradition, a Swedish theologian offers a theological argument for reconfiguring who counts as worth seeing and who does not.

This gathering of people is, of course, fictitious although their accounts feature to a greater or lesser degree in the respective articles in this issue. Lateral, self, state, commercial, high-tech, and non-technological surveillance strategies intersect with religious practices, identities, and ethical concerns. No one is turning to some essence of religion that is purportedly common to all. Rather, community, belief, and practice, each energised by faith, are woven together with systems of monitoring, data analysis, and influence. Faith is, in probably unique combinations, woven with political, cultural, economic, and historical perspectives. It is in taking surveillance and religion as complex constructions (whether or not one holds the view that religion's social-construction is without remainder) that the intersections are often fascinating and worthy of critical consideration.

### Intersections of Religion, Law, and Human Rights

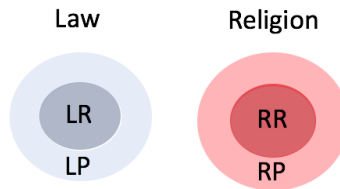
People who have some level of engagement with institutional religion encounter or practice surveillance in diverse polities. (The institutions of religion need not be bureaucratic or otherwise modernist.) Limiting our consideration for analytical purposes to simply the two fields of law and religion, we can identify eight possible intersections at which decisions are required by religious people. Both law and religion share the

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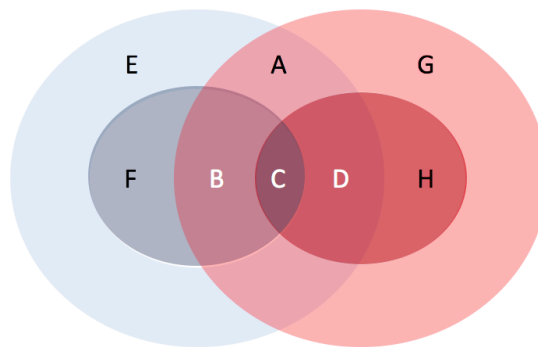
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characteristic that there are actions permitted and a subset required (Figure 1). LP—legally permitted; LR—legally required; RP—religiously permitted; RR—religiously required



**Figure 1**

As the two domains overlap in practice (Figure 2), there arise intersections that are relatively uncontentious and those that are often considerably more contentious (Table 1).



**Figure 2**

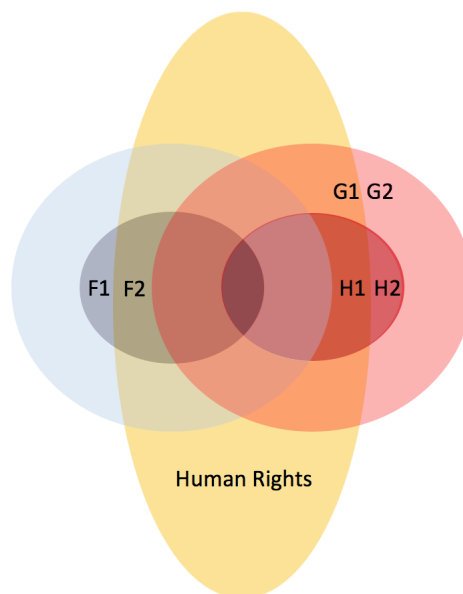
Uncontentious	A	Legally and religiously permitted.
	B	Legally required and religiously permitted.
	C	Legally and religiously required.
	D	Religiously required and legally permitted.
	E	Legally permitted but not religiously permitted.
Contentious	F	Legally required but not religiously permitted.
	G	Religiously permitted but illegal.
	H	Religiously required but illegal.

**Table 1**

An example of action that is both legally and religiously permitted (A) might include a smartphone app for self-monitoring the regularity of one's reading of sacred texts. (Although a community that broadly eschews modern technology, such as the Amish, might not so permit.) A legal requirement to report a fellow-believer who is being "radicalised" might also be permitted within the ethical system of a particular faith community (B). The use of data collection and scrutiny to monitor those working with vulnerable people could well be required both legally and religiously according to state legislation and the tenets of a religious organisation (C). In some religious traditions oracular confession to a priest on a regular basis is mandatory and legally permitted (D)—although it is worth observing that religious "requirements" can sometimes be treated by different groups with degrees of stringency (such as in expectations of disciplined fasting or almsgiving). How members and officials differently weight such stringency often merits critical study. There are practices that although permitted legally are not allowed by a religious group in light of its reading of its traditions (E). Deploying CCTV in a place of worship might, by some religious groups, not be permitted based on particular perceptions of privacy.

The more contentious intersections of law and religion are particularly interesting. A religious group might object to the definition of "radicalisation" that a particular state employs as its justification to require reporting of a person to the police (F). In such a case, informing is not permitted within the ethical framework of that religious community. There may also be instances where an action is religiously permitted but is illegal (G): holding people's personal information (particularly of religious identity) without explicit consent. Action that is religiously required, such as monitoring of women in a closed, insulated, patriarchal religious community, may amount to chattel slavery and be illegal in some jurisdictions (H).

It is, of course, unwise and mistaken to assume that a state's legal framework maps exactly to human rights conventions. By adding a further layer to the diagram (Figure 3), further points of intersection between law, religion, and now human rights emerge as potentially fruitful for critical examination (see Table 2). Quite what those intersections look like will depend on the particular human right (or cluster of rights) which is in play (e.g., freedom from arbitrary interference with privacy, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 12, or freedom of religion, Article 18).



**Figure 3**

Contentious	F	Legally required but not religiously permitted...	F1 ...and outside human rights.
			F2 ...although within human rights.
	G	Religiously permitted but illegal...	G1 ...and outside human rights.
			G2 ...although within human rights.
	H	Religiously required but illegal...	H1 ...and outside human rights.
			H2 ...although within human rights.

**Table 2**

The example of a state requirement to report a fellow worshipper who is being “radicalised” can be viewed in a new light. Where a state considers almost any religious activity as subversive, the legal requirement to inform falls outside human rights (F1), which would likely bolster a religious group’s ethical argument to not permit such reporting. However, where a state uses a “national security” caveat to proportionately limit freedom of religion (F2), the grounds on which a religious prohibition of informing on a “radicalised” worshipper are considerably less secure.

The case of a religious group encouraging some members to engage in sousveillance towards a discriminatory state (G1) might garner international support. On the other hand, a religious group that encourages its members to practise lateral surveillance of women entering an abortion clinic might well find their ethical stance challenged from a human rights perspective (G2).

There is sometimes the possibility that religiously required action might be illegal but still be within human rights conventions (H1). Here an example is of a religious group, in a state that prohibits or seriously constrains freedom of religion, consensually gathering data about people’s encounters with the security services. Finally, the case of women being monitored in a closed, isolated, patriarchal religious community from which escape is scarcely realistic would likely be criticised for being both illegal and outside human rights (H2).

Such a model of the intersections of surveillance practices in relation to religion, law, and human rights demonstrates a richly complex field of study. The ways in which these intersections are navigated will largely depend on the contextual hermeneutics of religious groups, some with reference to centralised systems (e.g., the Roman Catholic Magisterium of teaching and discipline). Other religious groups rely on decentralised arrangements (e.g., in the education of teachers of Islam), but both (centralised and dispersed models) practise within contexts of global mass communications that can generate new influential allegiances that variously reinforce or destabilise traditional lines of religious authority.

## Origins of this Special Issue

This special issue arises from an initiative initially funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council with a two-year grant that concluded in January 2018. This Research Network Grant made it possible to hold three workshops in the UK: one each on surveillance, religion, and security (held in Birmingham); religions consuming surveillance (held in Edinburgh); and twenty-first century religious ethics of surveillance (held in London). Fifty per cent of the papers in this volume were delivered in some form (in some cases at a developmental stage) at one of the workshops. The remainder arose from a general call. We,

the co-editors of this issue, jointly coordinate the Surveillance and Religion Network with the aim of stimulating research into the various intersections identified in Figure 3.<sup>1</sup>

We started the network because, as theologians, we noticed that religion was a blind spot in surveillance studies. We think it is crucial to raise different religious perspectives, not least religion and believers as objects for surveillance and surveillance/sousveillance from within religious communities. Whilst we undertake our research within the Christian tradition, membership of the network is open to researchers from any faith tradition, or none, and across all disciplinary fields. We welcome approaches from interested scholars.

## A Panorama of this Special Issue

The articles in this special issue address a number of—but by no means all—the intersections and do so with reference to specific contexts.

Smith Oduro-Marfo offers a study of the outworking of a state's efforts to manage religious activity. Through the analytical lens of (in)visibility, he considers outcomes of the Religious Bodies (Registration) Law enacted in 1989 by the military regime in Ghana. Oduro-Marfo demonstrates how state monitoring involves pragmatic elements of choosing to see and not see. Blending of strategic efforts at being visible and invisible is deployed by targeted religious bodies. From a different historical and geographical context—that of the Edo period in Japan (1603-1868), James Morris discloses similar dynamics within anti-Christian state surveillance. Here the use of informants, the composition of detailed registers, and tests of faith elicited a variety of responses that meant the state secured a measure of control over actions but not necessarily beliefs. With a reduction in the perceived threat posed by Christian communities and their labour value in an agricultural economy, the state adopts a stance of limited toleration.

Jijo James Indiparambil examines current tensions in India between its democratic commitment to religious freedom and pressure from hard-line Hindu nationalists to restrict the activities of minority religions. Identifying politicised religious vigilantism against Christian, Muslim, and other minority faith communities, Indiparambil's study casts light on the strain that can be placed on legal protections against discriminatory surveillance. Lior Volinz takes our attention to the politically and religiously charged site of Haram-al-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Here, the Israeli government's digital surveillance systems and Palestinian grassroots sousveillance operate with the additional adjudicatory component of internationally prescribed monitoring. Volinz unpacks the role of surveillance in variously balancing, mitigating, and resolving multi-dimensional conflict in a complex religious context.

Alongside broader ethical concerns, the use of informants can clash with religious sensibilities, as Ibrahim Bechrouri demonstrates in his study of Muslim communities in New York. Whilst suspicion might be fostered towards fellow believers, the deeper impact on a religious group can only be appreciated with reference to its theological values. Sharmin Sadequee further emphasises the importance of a critical approach to surveillance and religion in her challenge to prevailing assumptions around acceptable forms of faith under political liberal polity. Sadequee argues that despite its avowed secularity, the US state operates under Protestant Christian ideologies for the role of religion in society, with consequent frames of “good” and “bad” religion. It is against this specific backdrop that what properly constitutes “radicalisation” as a legitimisation for surveillance must be understood.

Deirdre McDonald opens up a different theme: surveillance by a religious group of its own members. In a study of a Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS) community in Canada, known to its members as Bountiful, McDonald demonstrates how an insular group maintains and deploys secrets and secretive practices as a strategy to control its own members and manage its relationship to law enforcement agencies.

<sup>1</sup> <http://ericstoddart.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/surveillance-religion-network/>

Another form of voluntary surveillance practices by religious communities is explored by Jason Pridmore and Yijing Wang in their study of smartphone applications designed to self-monitor spiritual disciplines. Choosing to be nudged towards practices such as Bible reading and prayer, users are selecting technologies of the self that are not so much about control but an expression of self-paternalism. Bex Lewis considers peer surveillance in the context of Christians using social media as a formational strategy. As peers include not only fellow believers but users beyond the Christian community, additional dimensions of performance emerge. Boundaries between secular and religious dimensions of a user's life may collapse, generating challenges and opportunities for spiritual integrity and formation. Brian Brock draws on his Christian theological tradition to expound a surveillance gaze that is critically attuned to how people are valued as variously worthy or not worthy of being seen. His political challenge is directed towards developing trusting and vulnerable community in which engaging in dialogue with human surveillance agents is a necessary component. Finally, an exchange between David Lyon and James Harding offers a debate over the importance and risks of attending to Jewish and Christian motifs in relation to cultures of surveillance.

### **A Future Agenda for the Study of Surveillance and Religion**

Of course to categorise a number of intersections of religion, law, and human rights as “uncontentious” easily glosses over the interpretation within these domains. Further research into how religious groups designate surveillance practices as permissible will open up theological, philosophical, anthropological, and sociological complexities. The hermeneutics operating within, for example, Christian readings of the divine and human gaze in the New Testament might be usefully critiqued. The authority ascribed by a religious group to its own sacred texts may well be contested through internal struggles worked out in strategies of power. Such investigations will be valuable to faith practitioners but also contribute to wider literacy amongst policymakers concerning how religion and surveillance intersect. Similarly, although practices may be required today by a religious group, the evolution of those practices over time points to the dynamic nature of religion. Women covering their faces and/or heads as an act of piety that affects how they are seen in analogue and digital contexts not only varies synchronically across religious traditions but may be examined diachronically within specific groups. The articles in this edition are valuable in their own right but, we hope, will stimulate other projects in surveillance and religion.

### **References**

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